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ABSTRACT

A total of 12 teacher education faculty members, 23 current education students, and 40 alumni responded to a questionnaire eliciting responses to seven aspects of the teacher education program at Buena Vista College in Storm Lake, Iowa. The seven aspects evaluated were: learning environment: scholarly excellence; quality of teaching; faculty concern for students; curriculum; departmental procedures; and available resources. While the populations differed on the value of specific components, they all had a general sense for the quality of the program. Students and alumni agreed more closely with each other than either did with the faculty. Each population also rated highest those elements over which they had the most control. The study highlights the need for a teacher education program to maintain a proper balance among student, faculty, and institutional needs in an atmosphere characterized by openness and willingness to change as affected populations grow, change, and develop. (CB)

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Perceptions of Faculty, Undergraduate Students and Alumni Regarding a Teacher Education Program

A Paper Presented at the Summer Workshop of the
Association of Teacher Educators, August 4-7, 1985, Wichita, KS

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by
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Given the fact of differing perceptions as illustrated by the overhead activity (See Appendix A), the purpose of this presentation is to raise the following question and respond to it: how do differing school populations perceive the same teacher education program. Essentially, three populations: faculty, current students, and alumni were asked to evaluate a teacher education program.

The survey was conducted at Buena Vista College in Storm Lake, IA. Buena Vista College is a private, four-year liberal arts college with an enrollment of approximately 1,000 students on the Storm Lake campus. Some 40 percent of the student body are education majors. The school enjoys a good reputation among the public and private schools of Iowa.

Method

The study employed the Program Assessment Questionnaire prepared by Educational Testing Service. It was administered to all full and part-time faculty members; 50 percent (N=12) returned the questionnaire. Further, it was sent to one-half of current education majors officially admitted to the teacher education program. Of these randomly selected students, 50 percent (N=23), responded. One-half of the alumni of the past three years were likewise randomly selected and sent the questionnaire; 38 percent of these were returned (N=40). This presentation reports on seven aspects of the teacher education program in which all three populations were asked to respond. They are environment for learning, scholarly excellence, quality of teaching, faculty concern for students, curriculum, departmental procedures, and available resources. The results follow.

Results

For each of the seven aspects of the evaluated program the results will be reported. Each aspect of the program which was evaluated was comprised of

several questions. Each of these questions will be reported in table form. The tables will include the rank order of response by population with 3= highest ranking, 2= middle ranking, and 1= lowest ranking; the mean for each group will be provided for comparative purposes with 1= poor or disagree strongly, 2= fair or disagree with reservations, 3= good or agree with reservations, 4= excellent or agree strongly (the response within each number varies depending on the question); and a summary ranking and mean for the aspect of the program under discussion.

Environment for Learning

As Table 1 details, this area under evaluation addresses academic and human factors which potentially enhance the learning environment. Table 1 indicates that faculty and alumni perceived more diversity in scholarly points of view than did current students. The three populations had a strong perception that the department is humane and fosters mutual respect between students and faculty, that majors support one another in meeting academic demands of the program, and that members of the department work together to meet program goals. Students and alumni believed the department to be more receptive to new ideas and ways of doing things than did the faculty. Overall, alumni saw the environment for learning most favorably, followed closely by students and faculty respectively.

Scholarly Excellence

Table 2 details the specific questions under this heading which concern student performance, intellectual environment, and professional competency and promise of faculty and students. The data from Table 2 reveal that students and alumni saw themselves as working harder to meet the demands of the program then did the faculty. Alumni and students respectively rated the intellectual environment of the department higher than faculty. Students, followed by alumni rated the professional competency of the faculty and their own peers higher then the faculty

did. Overall, students felt a bit more positive about the scholarly excellence of their program, followed by alumni and faculty respectively.

Table 1

Rank and Mean of Perceptions by Faculty, Students and Alumni of Environment for Learning

Question	Population		
	Faculty	Student	Alumni
Different scholarly points of view are encouraged	2 (3.08)	1 (2.86)	3 (3.13)
Dept. has humane env., mutual respect between students and faculty	1 (3.33)	2 (3.41)	3 (3.55)
Majors tend to support and help each other meet academic demands of program.	2 (3.27)	3 (3.36)	2 (3.27)
Members of dept. work together to achieve program goals	2 (3.25)	3 (3.38)	2 (3.25)
Dept. is receptive to new ideas and ways of doing things	1 (2.92)	3 (3.15)	2 (3.13)
Composite for above questions	1 (3.17)	2 (3.24)	3 (3.26)

Table 2

Rank and Mean of Perceptions by Faculty, Students and Alumni of Scholarly Excellence

Question	Population		
	Faculty	Student	Alumni
Majors work hard to meet the demands of the program	1 (3.08)	3 (3.32)	2 (3.15)
Dept. is an intellectually stimulating place for undergraduates	1 (2.82)	2 (2.86)	3 (3.17)
Intellectual environment	1 (2.75)	2 (3.05)	3 (3.35)
Scholarly and professional competency of undergraduate faculty	1 (3.00)	3 (3.24)	2 (3.18)
Scholarly and professional promise of students majoring in program/dept.	1 (2.75)	3 (3.05)	2 (2.88)
Composite for above questions	1 (2.88)	3 (3.03)	2 (2.95)

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Quality of Teaching

Table 3 reveals that faculty tended to believe that they prepared for their courses, and employed appropriate teaching methods to a greater extent than perceived by students and alumni. Further, students and alumni rated faculty criticism of students' work, helpfulness in dealing with classwork, and faculty awareness of new developments in the field positively.

Table 3

Rank and Mean of Perceptions by Faculty, Students and Alumni on Quality of Teaching

Question	Population		
	Faculty	Student	Alumni
Faculty members prepare carefully for their advanced level courses	3 (3.40)	2 (3.23)	1 (3.02)
Evaluation procedures used in upper level courses (e.g., grades, papers)	2 (3.00)	2 (3.00)	3 (3.15)
Teaching methods used in advanced courses (lectures, seminars, audiovisual aids)	3 (3.18)	2 (2.95)	2 (2.95)
Useful faculty criticism of your work (students and alumni only)	0 0	2 (3.00)	3 (3.05)
Faculty helpfulness in dealing with classwork (students and alumni only)	0 0	2 (3.10)	3 (3.20)
Faculty awareness of new developments in the field	1 (3.00)	2 (3.20)	3 (3.32)
Composite for above questions	3 (3.12)	2 (3.02)	3 (3.12)

Faculty Concern for Students

According to Table 4 faculty concurred that they are genuinely interested in students' welfare and professional development to a greater extent than perceived by students and alumni, though their ratings were high also. Alumni and students respectively rated communication with faculty regarding their needs

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and concerns, and opportunities for interaction with faculty higher than the faculty did. Overall, however, alumni felt the most positive about this area of the program.

Table 4

Rank and Mean of Perceptions by Faculty, Students and Alumni

of Faculty Concern for Students

Question	Population		
	Faculty	Student	Alumni
Faculty genuinely interested in undergrad. majors' welfare and prof. develop.	3 (3.75)	1 (3.50)	2 (3.57)
Good communication between fac. and students regarding student needs, concerns	1 (2.83)	2 (3.19)	3 (3.32)
Many opportunities outside classroom for interaction between majors-faculty	1 (2.64)	2 (2.71)	3 (2.80)
Composite for above questions	2 (3.23)	1 (3.13)	3 (3.26)

Curriculum

The data from Table 5 show that faculty perceived that courses were offered with appropriate frequency as indicated by the catalogue and that a variety of courses and programs were present to a greater extent than the other populations. Students, followed by alumni perceived depth in the courses and flexibility in the program for individual needs. While the difference is slight among the three populations, students felt best about the curriculum.

Departmental Procedures

From Table 6 one can conclude that faculty believed that they actively help students find employment/pursue further study, administered the degree requirements of the program, provided opportunities for student participation in departmental decisions, and provided a program relevant to students' future employment to a greater extent than that generally perceived by students. However, while all groups rated this aspect of the program low, alumni and students gave faculty slightly higher marks for their evaluation of students' progress toward the degree. The department also received low marks from students for curricular and career advising. Overall, from the composite scores, faculty ranked this area highest while students ranked it lowest.

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Table 5

Rank and Mean of Perceptions by Faculty, Students and Alumni of Curriculum

Question	Population		
	Faculty	Student	Alumni
Frequency with which courses listed in the catalog are offered	3 (3.17)	2 (3.05)	1 (2.92)
Variety of upper level course and program offerings	3 (3.00)	2 (2.86)	1 (2.77)
Depth in subject matter of upper level course and program offerings	1 (2.92)	3 (3.00)	2 (2.95)
Flexibility of program to meet the needs of individual undergraduate majors	1 (2.83)	3 (3.05)	2 (3.00)
Opportunities for departmental majors to pursue individual projects	2 (2.64)	3 (2.95)	3 (2.95)
Interaction between dept. and related disciplines or programs on campus	1 (2.42)	2 (2.75)	3 (2.78)
Composite for above questions	2 (2.83)	3 (2.87)	1 (2.81)

Table 6

Rank and Mean of Perceptions by Faculty, Students and Alumni of Departmental Procedures

Question	Population		
	Faculty	Student	Alumni
Dept. actively helps its graduates find appropriate employment/pursue study	3 (3.42)	1 (2.57)	2 (2.77)
Curricular and career advising	2 (3.08)	1 (2.67)	3 (3.15)
Agreement between degree requirements and stated objectives of the program	1 (2.75)	2 (3.05)	3 (3.10)
Administration of degree requirements	3 (3.25)	1 (3.00)	2 (3.13)
Opportunities for student participation in dept. decisions affecting the program	3 (2.33)	1 (1.95)	2 (2.11)
Relevance of degree requirements to students' anticipated work in field	3 (3.00)	3 (3.00)	2 (2.97)
Departmental evaluation of majors' progress toward the degree	1 (2.56)	2 (2.76)	3 (2.77)
Composite for above questions	3 (2.92)	1 (2.66)	2 (2.80)

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Available Resources

Table 7 indicates that students and alumni generally believed that the institution supports the education program adequately and that space, faculty and staffing are adequate. The major exception to this generalization was that students saw the library holdings as not that relevant to education. While composite scores are not high for this aspect of the program, alumni rated the area the highest with faculty giving it the lowest rating.

Table 7

Rank and Mean of Perceptions by Faculty, Students and Alumni of Available Resources

Question	Population		
	Faculty	Student	Alumni
Institution's library holdings relevant to the field	2 (2.75)	1 (2.33)	3 (3.02)
Laboratories, studios, and equip. needed for teaching and creative work in field	1 (2.58)	3 (2.94)	2 (2.79)
Overall adequacy of space and other facilities for classes and administration	1 (2.50)	3 (3.00)	2 (2.88)
Institution's commitment to the program	2 (2.67)	3 (3.00)	3 (3.00)
Overall adequacy of financial resources in support of this prog/dept.	1 (2.58)	3 (2.72)	2 (2.67)
Number of support and clerical staff (including student assistants) in prog/dept.	1 (1.67)	3 (3.05)	2 (2.58)
Quality of support and clerical staff	1 (2.17)	3 (3.00)	2 (2.62)
Composite for above questions	1 (2.42)	2 (2.91)	3 (2.61)

Discussion

When the data is viewed as a total unit, several patterns appear to emerge. One, perceptions regarding specific items under the seven areas of the reviewed

program varied considerably, e.g. different scholarly points of view under environments for learning. However, when one looks at the composite scores for each area, e.g. environment for learning, all populations agreed generally on whether that aspect of the program should be rated low or high on the evaluation scale. This seems to imply that all populations have a general sense for the quality of the program while differing on the value of the specific components.

Two, as a rule, students and alumni perceptions were much closer than was student and faculty or alumni and faculty. This likely reflects the fact that students and alumni are "program users" and they evaluated from that perspective.

Three, overall concurrence of perceptions by the three populations was greatest for the environment for learning area of the program. This likely reflects the concerted effort of Buena Vista College to be a warm friendly, caring campus.

Fourth, several patterns seemed to emerge in regard to faculty, students and alumni perceptions of the program. Generally, faculty tended to rate highest (1) aspects of the program over which they had control, e.g., preparation for a course, interest in students, advice to students; (2) aspects of the program for which they had some ownership, e.g., frequency of course offerings, variety of course and program offerings, and departmental procedures; and (3) aspects of the program which involved concrete action, e.g., assisting a student select a position or a graduate school. On the other hand, faculty tended to rate lowest aspects of the program which related to their beliefs: (1) beliefs about students, e.g., hardworking, professional competency and promise; (2) beliefs about the intellectual environment and the program offered, e.g., environment intellectually stimulating, program depth and flexibility, openness to and awareness of new ideas and trends; (3) beliefs about institutional commitments to the educational program, e.g., financial backing, clerical assistance.

Before isolating student and alumni perceptions, it is of interest to note that both groups, generally speaking, tended to rate themselves, their peers, the intellectual stimulation of college life, competency of their professors, availability of academic and personal opportunities higher than did the faculty. They tended to rate areas of probable personal frustration lowest: lack of faculty preparation, lack of variety of courses, apparent lack of immediate personal and career guidance, general administration of the program, and lack of input into the departmental decision-making process.

More specifically, however, students tended to rate highest (1) the efforts of themselves and their peers in working hard to meet the program demands and in supporting one another in the process; (2) the faculty in respect to working together, professional competence, openness and awareness of new ideas, and making the program relevant to ones future work; (3) the depth and flexibility of the program; and (4) institutional support for the program as evidenced by facilities, staffing, and program availability. Students' lowest rankings, on the other hand, tended to be on issues in which they were personally involved or affected. They ranked the following lowest; diversity of scholarly viewpoints, faculty interest in students, faculty curriculum and career advisement, library holding relevant to education, general administration of the degree program, and lack of opportunity for input in departmental decision-making.

Alumni, with a slightly broader perspective, tended to rate specific issues affecting them the highest. Those areas were (1) the faculty for their divergence in scholarly orientation, their evaluation procedures in upper level courses, usefulness of their criticism, their awareness of new issues in the field, and their curricular and career advising; (2) the departmental environment which fostered humaneness, which provided opportunities for faculty/student interaction, and was flexible enough to individualize programs; and (3) good interactions with the rest of the campus programs. Interestingly, of the three populations

alumni rated only three aspects of the program lowest: frequency in which courses were offered, variety of courses and programs, and faculty preparation.

Conclusion

This study readily lends credence to the stakeholder concept of program evaluation in which the various groups affected, even though they may have divergent and incompatible concerns, must be consulted and seriously heard in program evaluation if mutually beneficial program change is to occur (Weiss, 1983).

The study further highlights the need for a teacher education program to attempt a proper balance among student, faculty, and instutional needs in an atmosphere characterized by openness and willingness to change as affected populations grow, change, and develop. This attitude must be tempered by the reality that each population has somewhat differing perceptions of what constitutes a good program.

Finally the study does reiterate the findings of Adams and Craig (1983) that students believe they have the least input in program changes and Reiff's (1980) findings that students tend to perceive the academic program as adequate while faculty tended to perceive it as somewhat inadequate.

References

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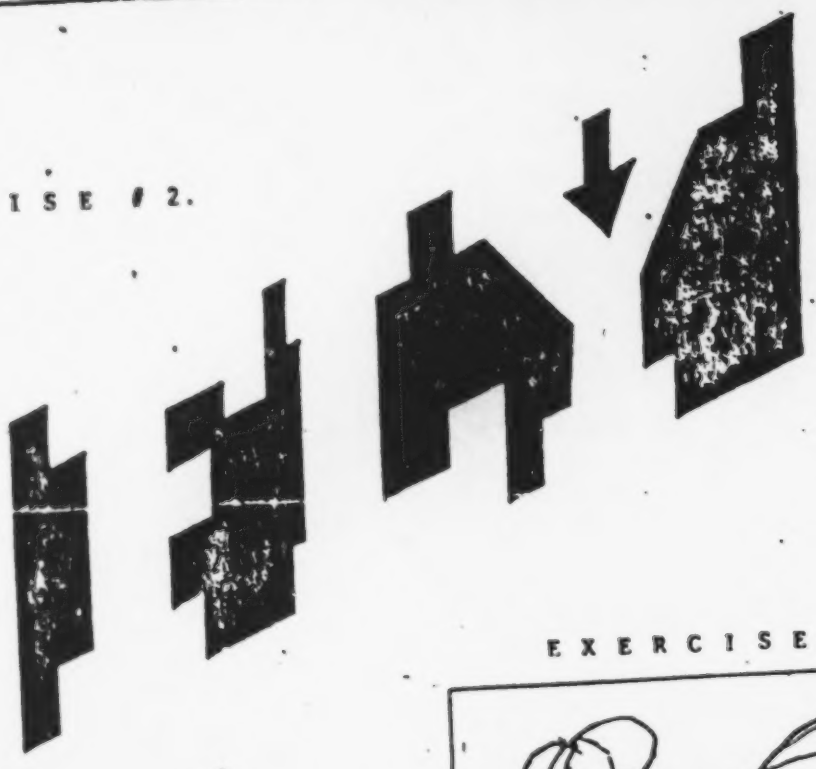
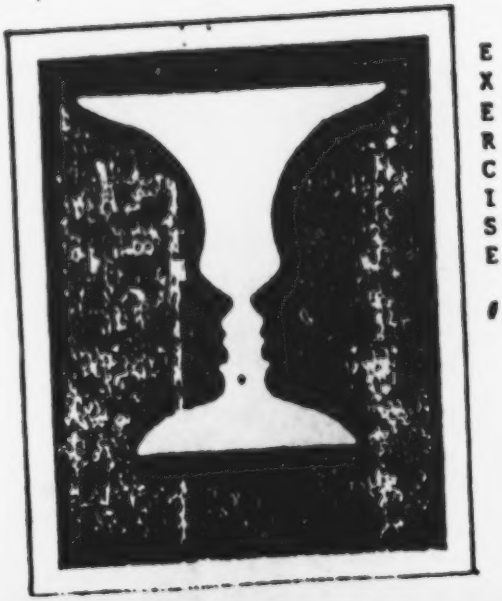
Appendix A

EXERCISE # 1.

EXERCISE # 2.



EXERCISE # 3.



EXERCISE # 4.